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CATALOGUE OF ENGRAVED
GEMS OF THE CLASSICAL STYLE

A MUSEUM department is entrusted with two main duties: first, the acquisition and installation of new material; and second, the publication or interpretation of this material to the public. The interpretation may take different forms. The immediate need is a concise label giving the most salient facts—the purpose, subject, date, and place of origin. The next step is a brief description in a bulletin article, where these facts are further elaborated, but where the object is still treated as a single acquisition. In due time follows a brief discussion in the handbook of the collection, where the new object is given a place in relation to the rest of the collection. And finally comes its full publication in a descriptive catalogue, where all the available facts are gathered together and final judgment is pronounced. This last process is necessarily the lengthiest, since it requires as exhaustive a study of the evidence as possible, and since it is, so to speak, the final interpretation. Moreover, the information is presented not in the temporary form of an article but in the more permanent guise of a book, which is to be reviewed and weighed in the balance by other members of the profession.

On the importance of the publication of such catalogues as part of the policy of a museum we may quote George H. Chase, Professor of Fine Arts at Harvard University, as follows:

"Among the obligations which a museum assumes in the acquisition of beautiful or interesting objects, the one which is most likely to be overlooked is perhaps that of adequate publication. If we may judge theory by practice, many directors and curators hold that their duty is done when an object has been properly accessioned and classified, adequately exhibited and labeled, and briefly described in a report or a bulletin or a handbook for the use of visitors. But all this is of comparatively little value for the advancement of knowledge, which is after all one of the purposes for which museums exist. What the specialist or the scholar usually wants to know is just what

examples of the particular type or group which he is studying are to be found in any particular museum, together with exact information about each example. For him the scientific catalogue is of prime necessity, and it is one of the encouraging developments of recent years that the number of such catalogues has steadily increased. Publication of such volumes is time-consuming and costly, but there is probably no single museum activity which brings greater indirect returns, or more truly increases the prestige of the institution which undertakes it."

Five years ago the Classical Department issued the first of such descriptive catalogues of its material, namely, that of the Greek, Etruscan, and Roman bronzes. Now we are able to announce the appearance of the second one—the Catalogue of the Engraved Gems of the Classical Style.¹ The scheme adopted in this catalogue of gems is essentially the same as in the earlier volume—namely, that of an introduction relating to bronzes in general, followed by a detailed description of the objects, classified chiefly along chronological lines. But in the catalogue of gems the introduction is much fuller, and this for two reasons. Classical gems are favorite objects among private collectors, and there is a large number of people who own at least a few of these beautiful stones. There is no reliable, up-to-date handbook on classical gems in the English language, so that to fill this obvious need it seemed advisable to make our catalogue of gems serve the purpose of a general handbook on the subject. As our collection of gems is of a very representative character, it lent itself exceptionally well to this purpose. The plan adopted has been to divide our material chronologically into the chief periods of ancient art, and within these chronological divisions to arrange the gems according to subjects. Each section is preceded by a short historical note, showing the influence of contemporary events on the art of gem engraving. The

¹Catalogue of Engraved Gems of the Classical Style, by Gisela M. A. Richter, Litt. D. New York, 1920. lxxiv, 232 pp. ill. pls. Octavo. Price, \$5.00; postage, 10 cents.

general introduction deals with the different aspects presented by ancient gems as a whole, their various uses, the choice of designs, the value placed on different gems at different times, the important problem of forgeries, the technique of gem engraving, and the chief materials used. It also includes lists of known gem engravers of the periods discussed.

It is hoped that this presentation of the subject will stimulate interest not only in our collection but in classical gems in general; for the study of Greek and Roman gems should form an admirable introduction to the study of classical art in general. Throughout a period of more than two thousand years the gems reflect faithfully the styles and reproduce the prevalent subjects of the various periods to which they belong; so that they represent an accurate picture of the development, the prime, and the decadence of classical art. The catalogue should also enable the gem collector to identify his stones as to periods and subjects and help him to determine their genuineness. As is well known, enthusiasm for ancient gems was at a great height in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Collectors rivaled each other in the acquisition of these pre-

cious works of art; they published them in luxurious catalogues with beautiful engravings for illustrations. This enthusiasm naturally stimulated unscrupulous forgers and a goodly crop of pseudo-classical stones soon began to flood the market. In our catalogue of gems such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions have been included in a separate section; and a comparison between the modern and ancient specimens ought to help train the eye of the collector.

To carry out the purpose of the catalogue full illustrations were indispensable. Accordingly, practically every gem in the collection is illustrated, the examples of each period being grouped together on different plates. The more important gems are repeated in enlarged form, each occupying a plate by itself. This special prominence enables the reader to see at a glance the chief works in our collection and also to appreciate better the beauty of these gems than is possible in the minute space of the originals. A few of the gems which, though not of unusual workmanship, are specially attractive in design or subject are repeated in the text in drawings made from enlargements.

NOTES

A ROOM OF EGYPTIAN JEWELRY. The recent acquisition of the exquisitely beautiful jewelry of the Princess Sat-hathor-iunut, as well as other considerable additions which have been made within the past few years to the representation of Egyptian jewelry and articles of personal adornment in the department, has rendered it advisable to bring together in one room these and other closely related classes of Egyptian material, in order that they may be seen and studied to better advantage when grouped in proximity in such a manner. The Eighth Egyptian Room has been set aside for this purpose and, with the completion of the new installation which has been in progress for some time, has now been opened to exhibition.

The central position in the room has

been given to the jewelry and accompanying objects of the Princess Sat-hathor-iunut, while in other floor-cases are shown representative examples of personal ornament of the successive historical periods—the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the Empire, and the Saitic and Graeco-Roman Periods respectively.

In surrounding wall-cases are exhibited scarabs, amulets, and many types of necklaces, in faience and the semi-precious stones employed so frequently by the Egyptians, including carnelian, amethyst, lapis lazuli, and green felspar. One case is devoted to a large and important collection of scarabs, comprising some six hundred unusually fine examples, lent by the Estate of Theodore M. Davis—a collection gathered together with great care by Mr. Davis